

*Interviewer:* Now, see, what I'm sort of interested in is how – it seems like you were such a good organizer back in the '30s and you did such a good job of organizing all the mines. And I don't know why they can't keep them organized, why they can't keep all those mines in the union, 'cause, you know, those guys that are working non-union lines now, when they retire – they may not feel too bad about it now – when they retire, they aren't gonna get any pension. They aren't gonna get any hospital care.

*Luther King:* Yeah. That's gonna be their hard luck. They should have stayed in the union, even though now they say that these operators with – strip mine operators were working *[Inaudible due to loud machinery in background]* were in the union. Well, if you're just working five-six-seven men, you'd be on \_\_\_\_\_. We've got reps where they are now.

So, it's like you say – they're not feeling the effects of it right now. There's gonna be a time coming when they will.

*Interviewer:* See, that's why I can't understand why they aren't fighting the way you fought back in the '30s. Now, wasn't there – Mister Bates was telling me something about the roving pickets and how you used to go around from mine to mine and try to stop them down, get them to fight for the union. Do you know why that movement failed?

*Luther King:* Yeah.

*Interviewer:* Why was that?

*Luther King:* 'Cause they wasn't union men in the first place. These roving pickets wasn't, might have been one out of every five union men had been a union man.

*Interviewer:* And who were they?

*Luther King:* Well, they started down in \_\_\_\_\_ County. I just don't know who started. I never had anything to deal with it at all. I kept a close-knit tab on it. They didn't come up in here and mess with us.  
*[Inaudible]*

We get along too good. But they did down in Hurricane. Hurricane would have been a hard county and it's still hard. But the knew – they don't fool with me, man. The only thing we interested in now – if these boys want to settle out of the union, go to these here little strip miners where we've seen organized. If they want to pull out of it, that's their business. They all fire. *[Inaudible due to poor audio]*

get us all in a *[Inaudible]*. Big mines – we don't have to worry about them. They just \_\_\_\_\_ contract from us. They just sign it there – they're \_\_\_\_\_ extract their mines *[Inaudible due to poor audio]*. Then, what part of the state – them big – *[Inaudible]* all the – they just *[Inaudible]*.

*Interviewer:* They just what?

*Luther King:* They all just signed another contract and go on work.

*Interviewer:* So, they don't even go out on strike now when contract time comes around.

*Luther King:* Nah, they don't. No, we don't even have to picket their mines or anything.

*Interviewer:* They just sign right up when the –

*Luther King:* They know it's good for 'em. The union's good for them and they're good for the union.

*Interviewer:* Do you think that you'd get better benefits if you went out on strike around contract time?

*Luther King:* Well, depend on just what we ask for. That contract is started about six months, you see. It's presented to the company. They get, I think, six months now to decide whether they want to sign it or not. It's laid down to them. And if they don't sign it, well, Nashville close them down.

*Interviewer:* Yeah. That's what I thought. You know, the Bituminous Coal Operators Association, it's called. Console is real big in that.

*Luther King:* It's not an actual coal company. Yeah.

*Interviewer:* And I guess they sit down with Tony Boyle and they work out what agreement –

*Luther King:* Yeah. They save some representatives. Instead of doing each year like we used to do – we used to have to do it at each mines. They said they have an international board meeting in Washington – or maybe some time in Florida, maybe some time in some of those places. They sit right down with and ask, "Did you sign that contract?" *[Inaudible due to loud truck moving by]*

*Interviewer:* Now what happens if guys – many \_\_\_\_\_ miners don't agree with the contract. There's not much they can do about it then.

*Luther King:* Anything they can do about it – so, they had their opportunity to vote on it before they're represented. Each contractor's presented each a local union and they vote on that contract – to accept it or not to accept it. If it's just accepted, there's nothing ever said about it \_\_\_\_\_ because they knew that they already accepted the contract.

*Interviewer:* Right. So, you don't think there's much hope of those mines going back – becoming union mines again now.

*Luther King:* No. No. They went to too far with the \_\_\_\_\_. They were organized – if they ever put a deep mine here again, the young boys would all [*Inaudible*]. The union – the older heads – never be too old to work in mines. That \_\_\_\_\_ – he's \_\_\_\_\_ get into that mine.

*Interviewer:* Especially after breathing all that coal dust. It's pretty rough work.

*Luther King:* Yeah. I worked 41 years in mines.

*Interviewer:* When did you go down? When do you start working?

*Luther King:* I started working 1913. See, I'm 77-year-old. I was last June.

*Interviewer:* Hm-hmm.

*Luther King:* Well, there's three years out – led out the first war.

*Interviewer:* You're pretty chipper for how old you are.

*Luther King:* I felt like sure a broken leg gonna kind of slow me down a little. I had a heart attack – was up here in the hospital – fell right in the hospital. Broke my leg.

*Interviewer:* Right in the hospital.

*Luther King:* And they had to send the UK – the man done the job on it – and he didn't do a good job. They had to send a new \_\_\_\_\_ and break it over again.

*Interviewer:* Oh.

*Luther King:* I spent seven months in the hospital.

*Interviewer:* I can't believe it.

*Luther King:* And \_\_\_\_\_ paid all them bills. Ooh.

*Interviewer:* And the union paid it for you. That was lucky there.

*Luther King:* Well, we got men and women spending –

*[Side conversation with some children]*

*Interviewer:* You know, I have a friend who's trying to get together a meeting of older union organizers with young guys – sit around and talk about it.

*Luther King:* You know, the younger guys can't hardly believe what the older guys had to go through to get \_\_\_\_\_.

*Interviewer:* Well, you see, what Mister Bates told me – now, I don't know what you think about it – see, he said that the younger guys aren't gonna fight as hard for the union because they don't know what real hard times are.

*Luther King:* No, they don't. They've had a little of it, no doubt. When they go to work 12-16 hours a day and making \$1.80 maybe. They can't get a part of that when they come out. Then, they know what hard times is – have to take it in scrip and no money.

*Interviewer:* But you think that as long as they get, you know, not union wages but good enough wages to live off of, they aren't gonna be real fighters.

*Luther King:* They ain't gonna pay that kind of money to get in. They won't even pay the dues.

*Interviewer:* If they tried real hard to organize those lines, would they all get fired? Would they lose their jobs there?

*Luther King:* No, they can't fire them for it. But they can't make it hard on – they wish they hadn't done it. I know how these operators works. They worked over me two or three times. But I went around just the same.

*Interviewer:* Uh-huh. I just – I admire that kind of courage so much. I just – you know, this project we're doing – collecting stuff for the libraries – my job on the project was to go around and talk to the older guys who were active in the '30s and I think I have the most interesting

part of the whole project 'cause I like the old guys better than I like the young guys. That's what it comes down to.

*Luther King:* In '59 when they had the soldiers here, you know, that was funny. We were fixed to blow up – well, I won't say what substation. One of them. They just put it in. It cost them \$70,000.00. And that operator was backing us hard. And he was gonna get it. We got everything set, you see, and we had the boys pretty close to the substation.

*Interviewer:* Close to the what?

*Luther King:* To the substation.

*Interviewer:* Uh-huh.

*Luther King:* Then we plant a bunch of boys down in \_\_\_\_\_ where this bridge was. We was blowing out bridges and everything. There was *[Inaudible due to laughter]*. They put off about four or five shots of dynamite – didn't put it off on the railroad – up on the hillside. Wasn't trying to hurt nothing, blow up anything, but these boys, man, they come just a-flying down there you know. Them soldiers did. See what it's all about. They shake the lights out of this town – dynamite – there's a bunch of 'em going off.

*Interviewer:* Honest to God, it's like fireworks time. Like Fourth of July?

*Luther King:* By the time they got down there, the blow that substation over at the river.

*Interviewer:* Honest to God – did anybody ever find out who did it? Nobody ever found out?

*Luther King:* Well, they still put in the \_\_\_\_\_, I guess.

*Interviewer:* And the soldiers were down here at this time?

*Luther King:* That's '59. They had 1,000 camps *[Inaudible]*. Last contract we had to fight for.

*Interviewer:* Yeah. The soldiers couldn't do much about that with all that dynamite. Coal companies must've been pretty angry when all that happened.

*Luther King:* *[Inaudible to wind blowing against microphone]* and they signed the contract that quick. This little right here was the end result of

all that – the \_\_\_\_\_ Motel. Of course, I'm staying here but I'm just staying here for a reason. He was into all that. They got the gun in \_\_\_\_\_ – he wouldn't go to the post office. *[Laughs]*

*Interviewer:* Now, who was this that they were –

*Luther King:* That was \_\_\_\_\_ right here.

*Interviewer:* Why were they after him?

*Luther King:* He was fighting back the union, you know, when he was trying to organize. We got two over there one time – one of the boys are dead now, but the other fella's alive and he got in the scale house and locked himself up and he \_\_\_\_\_ them dag-dum crazy miner sent me to fix the building before \_\_\_\_\_. No. This was the *[Inaudible]* in a minute. "Boy," I said, "you'll get us all in contention now."

*Interviewer:* *[Laughs]* And they weren't gonna stop at nothing, huh?

*Luther King:* No. Well, you take a thousand, 1500 men – it takes a lot to control them. Like, they once gets worked up, you know – you \_\_\_\_\_ whiskey up your miners. Then, they don't care from nothing.

*Interviewer:* So, how'd they finally control it?

*Luther King:* They finally signed the contract.

*Interviewer:* Now, why didn't – see, I think I'm terribly stupid about this. I don't understand it but I don't see why, if you're so successful doing it that way, why it wasn't successful all over.

*Luther King:* Man, I don't know. That's one I can't answer hardly.

*Interviewer:* That's just real hard for me to understand.

*Luther King:* All it said was to keep that \_\_\_\_\_, you know? If *[Inaudible]* couldn't do it *[Inaudible]*. There's other stuff, separate reasons. You never get out of jail or electric chair.

*Interviewer:* Yeah.

*Luther King:* That's why \_\_\_\_\_, I think, is a wonderful thing. If it's carried out but it'll never be carried out outright.

*Interviewer:* You know what I'm gonna do after I stop talking to you? I'm gonna go over – see if I can go over to the library and sit down and read that Taft–Hartley law 'cause I still don't understand exactly how it's worded. I think if I understood it, maybe I'd like, figure out a little bit better how those strikes weren't all – why –

*Luther King:* When you read that Taft-Hartley law, you'll find out that it's a good law if it's administered right. They're not administered right. Any miner will tell you that – organized men or not-organized men will tell you that. They're not administered right. And I didn't get why that Morseman code was passed neither. It's mainly for the Congressship that rules it. So, it gets [*Inaudible due to wind blowing against microphone*].

*Interviewer:* What they gonna get you up there for?

*Luther King:* I don't know what the investigation was.

*Interviewer:* Yeah?

*Luther King:* It's because I was an old miner, I guess. They got a lot of them up there – that \_\_\_\_.

*Interviewer:* Hmm.

*Luther King:* Now, what they get out of them, it ain't gonna hurt them. I've got 40 right here – \_\_\_\_ what I said – "I don't care to see it." And I'd say it to Mister Nixon or anybody else.

*Interviewer:* Yeah. You know what I ought to do? I ought to come back here after I read that law and talk to you again.

*Luther King:* All right. Anytime. I'm always around the swimming pool around here somewhere. I never go nowhere. I don't even go downtown anymore now. I haven't occasion to go to anywhere.

*Interviewer:* 'Cause I'm staying with friends over here in Isom.

*Luther King:* Isom. Where's that?

*Interviewer:* So, I'm gonna be around for a little while. Do you know other guys around that I could talk to?

*Luther King:* Well, not right off hand. I know a fellow John Bates down here – he's the president of our old union right there.

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*Interviewer:* See, he's the one I talked to. He told me your name. Told me that you knew a lot and that I come talk to you.

*Luther King:* He knows I've got in the thick of all that gun work, you know, that went on.

*Interviewer:* Yeah.

*Luther King:* They – they put our car on \_\_\_\_\_. I start the \_\_\_\_\_ – ask them if we make the \_\_\_\_\_. Let it sit out there a day or two. How I got out of that car, I don't know.

*Interviewer:* How is that?

*Luther King:* It just was full so full of bullet hole as can be. They had them state police up there, you see. And they had their own police. I guess they had 150-200 of their police. And we wasn't bothering nobody, just parading through town.

But they opened up on that car and that was riddled. They shot four or four of us. But they paid for it. When we went back the next time, they paid for it. But it don't never – we wasn't armed that time. And we come out straight home, armed ourselves, and went right back.

*Interviewer:* Were you in the car when they were shooting at it?

*Luther King:* Yeah. Shot the windshield out and everything.

*Interviewer:* And how'd you ever live through that? You just got down on the floor there?

*Luther King:* That's something I don't know, too. The whole damn car was shot. They wasn't killed. There was three of us in the car.

*Interviewer:* You were lucky.

*Luther King:* Yeah. That's lucky. Just like I was in the first world war. I was lucky there, too.

*Interviewer:* Where were you fighting in the war?

*Luther King:* I fought from the Belleau Wood straight through the Ardennes Forest, fought every battle. I went in as a ground troop; come out as a first lieutenant. I fought my way right on up. I didn't go to no officer training school.



*Interviewer:* Did you come right back into the mines after you got back?

*Luther King:* I came to Virginia. That's where my home was at that time. I came to Virginia and joined the police force there. That's when I went to \_\_\_\_\_. I joined the police force in '20. '21 they tried to organize and I wouldn't go along with the company on it. Then, I come over here.

*Interviewer:* So, you quit the police then?

*Luther King:* Hm-hmm.

*Interviewer:* You went back into the mines.

*Luther King:* Yeah. I came here. Went back into the mines.

*Interviewer:* Was there – there as a big organizing drive all over in '21-'23, wasn't there?

*Luther King:* Oh, yeah. Yeah.

*Interviewer:* 'Cause I was talking to some –

*Luther King:* They wasn't successful with it, though.

*Interviewer:* That's what – yeah. I was talking to some people over in Logan County, West Virginia. They had a big drive down there and they were very unsuccessful. They have sheriffs – deputy sheriffs, \_\_\_\_\_ detectives.

*Luther King:* *[Inaudible due to wind blowing against the microphone]* They spent millions of dollars trying to stop it, you see. And it cost a lot of lives. I wonder, throughout the United States, how many lives is lost. I guess this district – the third district – I guess we lost 100 men.

*Interviewer:* Just there in '21. Huh.

*Luther King:* Then, when we started in '36, then it was bad – it was bad for a little while, but it didn't last too long.

*Interviewer:* 'Cause you had the law on your side then.

*Luther King:* *[Inaudible due to loud truck going by]*

*Interviewer:* So, you were active back there in '21, too, doing that organizing.

*Luther King:* But we didn't have no protection – no way – shape, form, or fashion.

*Interviewer:* And what happened to the mines in 1919-1920 when guys had first come back from the war – the veterans and –

*Luther King:* That's when they begin trying to organize.

*Interviewer:* Do you think that there was something about having been away and having fought in the war that made those guys more willing to organize?

*Luther King:* Possible. When we come back from the war – just like these boys that come back – of course, they're not fighting a war like we fought. They're fighting – they were \_\_\_\_\_. They weren't allowed to fight. If they turn loose and fight – well, they get law \_\_\_\_\_, [Inaudible]. Just like that \_\_\_\_\_.

*Interviewer:* All right.

*Luther King:* They should have never moved to \_\_\_\_\_.

*Interviewer:* It's mostly automated warfare now. Is that –

*Luther King:* When we was fighting – we'd have orders to take a town and that town was notified 24 hours beforehand. The women and children had better be out of there. We didn't leave anything standing. There's nothing ever said about it. If we couldn't burn it, we'd blow it up.

*Interviewer:* You know, I would think – now, I don't know whether I'm right about this, but that guys who had been fighting that way in the war – they'd come back and they'd know how to fight that way. And they'd know what it was to live real rough. They'd be more willing to fight just that hard to get a union.

*Luther King:* Hm-hmm.

*Interviewer:* Do you think that's true? I wasn't alive then. I don't know.

*Luther King:* I think that had a lot to do with it all right.

*Interviewer:* Hm-hmm.

*Luther King:* And it's still in their blood, you see. It'll never get out. Sometimes, I wake up at night right now sweat pouring off of my face from things that I've gone through long years gone. The first war.

*Interviewer:* I wonder how things are for the guys who fight over in Vietnam.

*Luther King:* Them boys, I believe, has had it tougher than they had it in the second war or the Korean war.

*Interviewer:* I think that's probably true. It's pretty rough over there.

*Luther King:* I lost a grandson over there. And I got one coming back and he's still good. I'm gonna have two of them – both of them \_\_\_\_\_. One that lives right in Tennessee – he got shot down in a chopper. His nerve's been shot ever since. They brought him back at \_\_\_\_\_ Hospital – they got to looking for him – the next morning, he wasn't there. He come to Tennessee. They don't even know how he got out of there. He's had his pjs. He don't know his self how he got to there in Tennessee.

*Interviewer:* Hm-hmm. Is he working there or?

*Luther King:* He's working Frigidaire in Dayton. He's a security guard.

*Interviewer:* Many of those Vietnam veterans come back and go into the mines.

*Luther King:* All of them, if they have a mind in them, come right back in the mines.

*Interviewer:* Hm-hmm. There goes a coal truck. They really make the roads hard to drive around here. I've been driving around a lot.

*Luther King:* I know. It makes it hard.

*Interviewer:* Well, I probably talked to you a long time but I just –

*Luther King:* I don't care. I haven't said anything that's interesting. No way.

*Interviewer:* [Laughs] Yeah. Just I'm about out of tape, but I may come back and talk to you again 'cause just – I think this is the best job I've ever had [Luther laughs] 'cause just – like I say, I decide I like old people now better than –

*Luther King:* What, the young ones?

*Interviewer:* Yeah.

*Luther King:* Well, the young ones don't realize what it's all about. And they never will till through it.

*Interviewer:* Do you think they'll ever have a chance to go through?

*Luther King:* I don't know. *[Inaudible]* \_\_\_\_\_ not in the big mines.

*Interviewer:* It'll be in the little mines.

*Luther King:* In the small mines.

*Male:* Let's go take a swim, Luther.

*Luther King:* No, thanks, buddy. 340 pounds \_\_\_\_\_ going in that pool.

*Interviewer:* So, you think it'll be the small, non-union – the track mines and the strip jobs.

*Luther King:* It's pretty \_\_\_\_\_. They're there right now. They're falling down right now. It may two or three-four years to do it.

*Interviewer:* Hm-hmm.

*Luther King:* I might not be around because I'm getting to be an old hand now. I buried my brother Sunday. He was 94. He had to go to the mines, too. So, I didn't \_\_\_\_\_ him and my brother's \_\_\_\_\_ in Oklahoma working for the government now. There's three – three of us brothers.

*Interviewer:* And you all were active back then.

*[Side conversation with the children]*

*[Tape makes squealing noise]*

*Luther King:* \_\_\_\_\_ years now.

*Interviewer:* That's pretty nice.

*Luther King:* And it's not the color \_\_\_\_\_. *[Inaudible]* in the wintertime. I stay – I board here all the time. When I lost my wife about five years ago – six years ago now – I've been here ever since. I sold the home *[Inaudible]*.

*Interviewer:* It's pretty nice to have all these kids around.

*Luther King:* I tell 'em I buried my brother Sunday and they were all in. They were all far away as kin. They all came in – they had 20 rooms in this motel here.

*Interviewer:* The whole motel.

*Luther King:* We almost had a reunion. It really like a reunion instead of burial.

*Interviewer:* You know, you're telling me about your brother who worked as an organizer –

*Luther King:* Lawrence King. He's dead. He died right on Sunday.

*Interviewer:* Hm-hmm.

*Luther King:* And the other's in Oklahoma.

*Interviewer:* So, I can't go talk to him.

*Luther King:* No. He won't even tell me what he does there. He works for the government. He flies all the time, I know that. He owns a plane and he flies everywhere. He flies in here – he's got a –

*[End of Audio]*